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THE RELIGION OF A MATURE MIND.

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A LARGE-SPIRITED book¹ by Professor George A. Coe, bearing the above striking title, first appeared in 1902, and has within eighteen months gone through four editions, an unusual record. This success, too, is well deserved. The book is beautiful in its fineness of literary excellence; there is a grandeur and impressiveness about its utterances; it is bold and even daring in its criticism; there is, no less markedly, a warmth and delicacy of appreciation of the good in creeds, forms, and ceremonies both old and new; it is all this and more. But whatever impression one carries from the volume, one must at least feel that there is a magnanimity about it—a breadth of view, a depth of insight, an inspiration—which makes it easily occupy an important place in the thought-life of the present. One wonders at times whether the motive which called it forth was religious, or theological, or scientific, or philosophical, or practical. It is certainly all these. It embodies the large outlook of a man who has worked abreast of his time long enough to feel its ideals, its needs, and its vital problems intimately. So that many of the topics treated—the scientific spirit in religion, the question of religious authority, the relation of morality and religion, the way of entrance into the spiritual life, the tests of religious experience, the immanence of God, prayer, the relation of Christ to modern life, and others—while common enough in recent discussion, and topics that might easily be commonplace, are presented with unusual force and conviction.

A work of this kind is especially opportune. If Christianity were a system and not an inner experience, if it were a final product instead of a great growing life which asserts itself from within and adjusts itself to every new situation as does every other growing thing, it would be threatened at the present time. The often expressed opinion that during the last decades, in the presence of new discoveries and shifting ideals, religion has had such a test as perhaps rarely before, can hardly

¹ *The Religion of a Mature Mind.* By GEORGE ALBERT COE, PH.D., Professor of Philosophy in Northwestern University. Fourth edition. Chicago: F. H. Revell Co., 1903. Pp. 442. \$1.35, *net*.

be gainsaid. Mankind has had to face, with, to be sure, its stock of life on hand, which draws perennially from the eternal springs, the whole problem of life afresh. "The supreme practical task now facing the Christian world at large," says the author, "is parallel to that of the college student. The church at large has to emerge from the dogmatic and emotional attitude essentially characteristic of youth, into the equilibrium of a spiritual maturity which shall include at once intellectual freedom and illumination, emotional health and practical aggressiveness." It has been inevitable that, in the midst of the unrest and uncertainty, the doubtings and negations, the exaggerated conservatism, the untutored assertions of freedom, and the partial upbuildings that are so common, the readjustment of religion which makes it answer to the fullest demands of life should come from within religion itself. If such a reconstruction has not already been made, this volume at least voices, in some sort of an adequate way, the harmony which has been working itself out in our midst, between the great things of the spiritual life and life itself.

It represents the educated religious consciousness asserting itself and coming into its own estate. And so one can understand how, from the standpoint of religious criticism, it takes a ground almost new—at least within recent years—a ground which, it is to be wished, might become a general and habitual one, that of *constructive* criticism. The religious world has suffered through a period of negative criticism, when the few courageous souls among the dissatisfied dared to cry against the deaf ears of those who had settled into contentment around some finality; and to attack them with ridicule, or sarcasm, or logic, or scorn. We have seen enough of "apologetics" and Christian "evidences," reasoning toward foregone conclusions and rejoicing to make the improbable look rational and logical, if only it would support a system in the supposed interest of a God of veracity, and a Christ who never used such tactics in his own behalf. We have had a taste of the scientific analysis of religious phenomena, which claims only to describe objectively the facts and processes which spring out of some inner reality. But it is, perhaps, generally recognized that the Baconian ideal, while it has called the world away from hopeless subjectivity, if followed to its logical limit, never has attained and never can attain results, even in physical and biological sciences. In the very act of objectifying and classifying, the mind has put its stamp, rightly or wrongly, on the world. It has done so again in the least act of interpretation. Facts of themselves never speak forth any truth.

Each step in any scientific procedure represents the conscious or unconscious assertion of the inner life of man of its right to express itself, and to square itself with the objective world. If the world were old enough to appreciate to its full worth this simple fact, it would bring to an end much of the disputation between idealists and materialists, between science and philosophy, and between those who employ scientific methods in the study of religion and those, on the other hand, whose sole bent is toward worship and religious experience. In matters of religious criticism we should find, as one undoubtedly does in this volume before us, the spirit of religion uttering its deepest conviction, and at the same time daring to take account of any and all the facts of experience, and even rejoicing to adapt and readjust its strongholds to include within itself the essential reality of all those things which appeal to mankind as inviolably true. Just because it takes this higher ground, it will not satisfy those, whether conservative or radical, who are sworn in their hearts to defend always a specific formulation of religious truth or a definite attitude.

But has this volume itself no presuppositions? This consideration will lead us into the heart of the situation. It is difficult to find a book which accepts more warmly and unqualifiedly, as both starting-point and goal, the essential postulates of Christianity, God, Christ, duty, and love. "Let us assume, then, that somehow the bottom fact of our being is God;" "The moral implications of this term [the ideal Christ] show us how impossible it is to escape what goes under the name of Christ;" "The great fact of duty stands out upon the human horizon as boldly as Mont Blanc from the valley of Chamounix;" "Confidence that love is not only a law for us, but also a law for the universe, yields a basis of faith."

Wherein, then, is the difference between these assumptions and those, for example, of the average theologian? In the first place, they are *recognized* as assumptions, or rather postulates, and so capable of unlimited scrutiny, and accordingly rejected if they do not satisfy (and who could not guess what a Christian scholar would do with them?), or, if retained, then given constantly broader and fuller meaning, since "religion requires readjustment as continuous as the struggle for life itself." In this point of view, do not the essentials of religion, formerly accepted as final and absolute, lose some of their majesty, and weaken in their binding influence on the lives of men? Rather the contrary, since "any flash of insight into the good, however dim and incomplete, at once lays obligation upon us." The volume is, in part,

an examination of some of the central postulates of religion to test their reasonableness and their fitness to command our complete devotion.

The test, however, what shall that be? This is the essential difference between this volume and those to which we have been accustomed in religious and theological discussions. The appeal is everywhere and always away from logic, and rational consistency, to the "practical reason." The question is not, What sort of a little self-consistent system can I erect here in the midst of this great pulsing life of men? but rather, What are the indubitable verities that men have discovered by and through the mere fact of living and struggling; what are the practical certainties by which they live and without which life would be distorted and weakened? This point of view is one that has been growing since Kant's *Critique of the Practical Reason* and Schopenhauer's *Four-fold Root of the Doctrine of Sufficient Reason*. It is the inevitable outcome of the general decline of an intellectualistic psychology, and also of the adoption of a wholesome degree of empiricism in matters of religion. It is the point of view, for instance, of Professor James in the recent Gifford Lectures, published under the title, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). One rejoices to find a man who has the wisdom and strength to interpret to us the entire range of religious experience from this standpoint, and who has done it with such clearness and conviction as has Professor Coe in these essays.

It is now generally recognized that the reasoning processes are a *product* of experience, developed as a useful tool in clarifying and fixing the elements of experience in relation; they can produce nothing, can give no actual results over and above that which is given through experience. "We go backward into history," the author aptly remarks, "and upward into metaphysics because we have something that needs explaining." It is a pity we have not seen, and a greater pity if we do not come fully to recognize, that our theologies and christologies are merely attempts to justify experience. Because reason has not recognized its own limitations, it has been engaged largely in a hopeless quest. The verities of religion, when justified by experience, must claim the right to stand firm and fearless in the world without waiting for the crude attempts of some stilted set of logical sequences to give them recognition. Says the author: "The traditional plan seeks to develop experience out of the syllogism; the modern scheme begins with experience and makes it the chief basis of its theories. . . . According to one, all practical values depend upon the correctness of

somebody's logic; the other boasts of treasures so secure that no theory can endanger them." What shall we say, then, of the reasoning function? Has it no value? Must theology and historical criticism and metaphysics count for naught? Reason has, on the contrary, the same rôle to perform in religion as everywhere else. "Right thinking is one factor in the complete integration of life at which religion aims." It exists for the sake, merely, of the skilful examination of the stock of experience already on hand. The reader who does not take this fact fully into account will doubtless stumble in many parts of the volume. In the chapter, for example, on "Some Things That We Know," if the word "know" were taken in a hard and fast sense which implies logical necessity, the conclusions would be far from convincing, and the skeptic might leave the chapter with scorn and the theologian with a feeling of vacancy or of condescending pity and compassion. The argument does not claim to be a proof, but an inquiry into those things that stand out in our lives as tested facts of experience. Consequently, in discussing the "hypothesis of a God who is our Father" we find,

Looking at the history of man as a whole, and at the history of Christianity in particular, we cannot fail to perceive that the God-idea has perennial vitality; or that the Christian form of this idea is an all-conquering one. . . . The experience of the world as a whole shows that Jesus' idea of God is the best interpreter of life we have as yet discovered. It leaves fewest dark corners, and adjusts, better than anything else has done, the practical machinery of life. . . . To most men the existence of God is as little in need of proof as the duty of loving kindness. The very atmosphere of life has divinity in it.

And so in the remarkable chapter on "The Christ of Personal Experience," which, if read and believed, must either mollify or entirely end the differences between Unitarians and Trinitarians, the author says:

The authority of Jesus is nothing more than the fact that he so infuses himself into every soul before whom he has been lifted up as to make it impossible to be one's self without making him the Master of one's life. Thus is the Christ of experience more impelling than the Christ of syllogism. The one is a fact, the other is a theory. . . . We simply refuse to limit ourselves to the preferred mode of procedure. Inasmuch as the modern world has chosen to make its appeal to experience, we meet it on its own ground, saying that experience proves the right of the Christ to the service of our lives.

The bearing of this attitude on "Authority in Religion" can be divined. The author adopts the method of Jesus in this respect, and

says: "Religious authority is within us. It is what we are, demanding to express itself, to be fed, to grow." What a sinister note this must be to those who are safely ensconced behind the authority of spoken word or church or creed! And how useless it must sound to those who believe that no authority exists!

Certainly few will agree with all the postulates of religion that Professor Coe finds in this beginning of the twentieth century to stand out as an approximation to the eternal verities. The non-Christian reader, for instance, must smile at the author's assumption that the best there is in modern manhood is a direct product of Christianity (pp. 128 *et al.*), and at the same time Christianity stands justified by attributing its undesirable elements to heathen origin (p. 221). But the reader who catches the spirit of the book will not care for points like this. It is a summons to each person who has a revelation of the true and beautiful to utter it with the same warmth and conviction and hope, so that deep may answer to deep in the lives of men.

While we have in this way a fresh and imposing contribution to religious literature, still one would miss perhaps the greatest value of the book if it were judged as a treatise on religious criticism. It speaks directly to the lives of men. And indeed, having deposed false claimants to infallible authority, and having foresworn the usual weapons of defense of religion—in fact, having set religion free and vouchsafed to it the right to live its own life and to speak for itself—one is interested to know what fresh message it has to bring forth. It undoubtedly occupies higher religious ground than is customary. And in feeling through the pages to find the source of its power to speak home to the heart and to stir the will, we find that it centers, perhaps, in a solution of the personal relation of the individual to the totality of things. The keynote to much of it is a vitalized sense of the immanence of God, with all that that implies.

The belief in the immanence of God has a wondrous power of dissolving things. Immerse a priest in it, and he comes out just a man among men. Pour it on the place of prayer and upon the instruments of worship, and all the glamour and special efficacy disappears. Sprinkle it upon the place of business, and behold the partition that separates commerce and industry from communion with God is gone (p. 332). . . . The doctrine of immanence is little more than a consistent exposition of the ancient belief that God is not only the Creator of the universe, but also the omnipresent Upholder of all things (p. 415). . . . The glory of living and the awfulness of sin rest alike upon this inseparable union of the divine and the human within every individual (p. 416).

Applying this belief to the question of religious education (chap. x), one sees that the chief end is not so much to save men from something as to bring the kingdom of God into fruition in the lives of children and men. With respect to prayer (chap. xi), instead of puzzling ourselves over "answers" to prayer, we have found the reason for prayer in prayer itself. . . . It carries its end, its justification, its efficacy in itself. . . . At its highest, it is the conscious realization, in some degree, of the union with God that is the supreme end of living.

With reference to the sense of sin (chap. xii), its apparent decline means the substitution in society of positive ends instead of negative; that religion is fitting men, not simply for a life to come, but for a divine life here in the world. "To desire to bring something really worth while to pass—this is the Christian attitude toward life as a whole, and this implies all that is included in the Christian attitude toward sin." One of the best fruits of this conception of immanence, is a widened interpretation of religion. One feels directly how, through the influence of mysticism, emotionalism, dogmatism, intellectualism, and other partial tendencies, the term "religion" has come to stand for certain special lines of expression. While in reality, as Professor Coe's analyses clearly show, the scientist or moralist or philanthropist often has as genuine a religious spirit as many professed religionists, though calling it by some other name; that many are religious without knowing it; that religion at its best has the scientific spirit; and that, given the right attitude toward the whole of life, and making allowance for varying tastes and temperaments, "all the strings of the harp respond to God's touch." From this one can reconstruct much that the volume contains; but the person, even, who has worked out for himself a similar interpretation of life and religion will find it throughout inspiring and illuminating.

The volume stands for what is most needed at the present time—perspective. It is a time when, rightly or wrongly, as never before, perhaps, men are taking into their own hands and working out consciously their attitude toward religion, society, and institutional life, and, consequently, when all the currents of life need to be taken into account. It is a time, especially, when men need to be imbued with a right attitude—sincerity, faith, hope, and the desire to be constructive units in the ever-recurring and now immanent world-awakening. The reader is sure to catch the spirit of the book, and wherever it comes it is destined to be a steadying and helpful influence.